



## **Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding**

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understanding: from Lipps to Schutz**

**Abstract**

When it comes to understanding the nature of social cognition, we have – according to the standard view – a choice between the simulation theory, the theory-theory or some hybrid between the two. The aim of this paper is to argue that there are, in fact, other options available, and that one such option has been articulated by a various thinkers belonging to the phenomenological tradition. More specifically, the paper will contrast Lipps' account of empathy – an account that has recently undergone something of a revival in the hands of contemporary simulationists – with various accounts of empathy found in the phenomenological tradition. I discuss the way Lipps was criticized by Scheler, Stein and Husserl, and outline some of the core features of their, at times divergent, alternatives. I then proceed by considering how their basic take on empathy and social cognition was taken up and modified by Schutz – a thinker whose contribution to an analysis of interpersonal understanding has been unjustly neglected in recent year.

In recent years, much of the discussion of the nature of social cognition has taken place within the framework of the so-called theory-of-mind debate. The expression 'theory of mind' is generally used as shorthand for our ability to attribute mental states to self and others and to interpret, predict, and explain behaviour in terms of mental states such as intentions, beliefs, and desires (cf. Premack & Woodruff 1978, 515). Although it was originally assumed that it was the possession and use of a *theory* that provided the individual with the capacity to attribute mental states, the contemporary debate is split on the issue, and is generally considered to be a dispute between two views. On one side, we find the *theory-theory of mind* and

on the other the *simulation theory of mind*. Whereas the theory-theory argues that our understanding of others mainly engages detached intellectual processes, moving by inference from one belief to the other, the simulation theory of mind denies that our understanding of others is primarily theoretical in nature, and maintains that we on the contrary use our own mind as a model when understanding the minds of others.

On closer consideration, this neat division turns out to be an oversimplification. Not only because of the existence of several hybrid theories, but also because neither of the main positions are theoretical monoliths. Theory-theorists are basically split on the issue of whether the theory in question is innate and modularized (Carruthers, Baron-Cohen) or whether it is acquired in the same manner as ordinary scientific theories (Gopnik, Wellman). As for the simulationists, some claim that the simulation in question involves the exercise of conscious imagination and deliberative inference (Goldman), some insist that the simulation although explicit is non-inferential in nature (Gordon), and finally there are those who argue that the simulation rather than being explicit and conscious is implicit and subpersonal (Gallese).

Despite these added nuances, there is nevertheless still widespread consensus regarding the limited number of options. A satisfactory account of social cognition must be provided by simulation theory, by theory-theory, or by some hybrid between the two. There are no other options available. However, this orthodoxy has recently been challenged by several authors who have argued that the forced choice between theory-theory and simulation-theory is a false choice (Zahavi 2005, Gallagher 2005, Gallagher & Zahavi 2008). Not only have they argued that there are other options available, and that, in particular, the phenomenological tradition contains highly perspicacious insights concerning the nature of social cognition, but they have also argued that the simulation theory and the theory-theory – although frequently depicted as quite opposed accounts of the basic nature of social cognition – actually share a number of crucial but questionable assumptions. Most importantly, despite their many differences, the theory-theory of mind and the simulation theory of mind both deny that it is possible to *experience* other minds, both presuppose the fundamental opacity or invisibility of other minds. It is precisely because of the alleged absence of an experiential access to the minds of others that we need to rely on and employ either theoretical inferences or internal simulations. Both accounts consequently share the view that the minds of others are concealed and hidden, and they consider one of the main challenges facing a theory of social cognition to be the question of how and why we ascribe such hidden mental entities or processes to certain publicly observable bodies.

In previous writings, I have offered various criticisms of the theory-theory and simulation theory of mind, and I will not rehearse that criticism here (Zahavi 2005, 2007, 2008). Rather, in the following, I wish to add yet another piece to our understanding of the alternative account provided by central figures in the phenomenological tradition. More specifically, my main objective will be to show why the phenomenological account shouldn't simply be classified as yet another version of simulationism.

In the beginning of his recent book *Simulating Minds* Goldman writes that he considers mindreading an extended form of *empathy* (Goldman 2006, 4). Goldman is by no means the only simulationist who has started to employ that term when characterizing our basic mindreading abilities. Indeed, recently, it has even been claimed that simulationists are today's equivalents of empathy theorists (Stueber 2006, ix). On Goldman's construal the modern debate goes back roughly 50 years to Ryle and Wittgenstein, though Goldman does acknowledge that simulationist themes can be found scattered in earlier theorists, such as Lipps and Dilthey (Goldman 2006, 18). What is conspicuously absent from Goldman's overview, however, is any reference to the discussion of social cognition found in phenomenology. I am not merely thinking of the significant and substantial contribution to an understanding of intersubjectivity found in the works of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but also of more specific works such as Edith Stein's *Zum Problem der Einfühlung*, Aaron Gurwitsch's *Die mitmenschlichen Begegnungen in der Milieuwelt* Max Scheler's *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* and Schutz' *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*.

In a footnote added in a late Polish translation of his 1918 dissertation on Bergson, Roman Ingarden makes the following observation:

At the time when this treatise was written, extensive discussions took place regarding the so-called empathy, a notion that had been proposed by the psychologizing German aesthetes like for instance Theodor Lipps. A number of phenomenologists such as M. Geiger, Max Scheler, Edith Stein and later also Husserl participated in this discussion and it became increasingly clear that the classical theory of empathy which considered it a kind of projection of one's own psychical states into foreign bodies had to be replaced by a theory that took empathy to be a special kind of perception of the psychical states as they are manifest in the bodily expression (Ingarden 1994, 170-171).<sup>1</sup>

By the end of this paper, I hope to have made it clear what the central core of this alternative amounts to. In the first brief section, I will present some of the central ideas in Theodor Lipps' account of empathy. This background is important since it was an account that all the phenomenologists to various degrees distanced themselves from. I will next focus on the discussion of empathy that we find in Scheler, Stein and Husserl. I will then discuss the way in which this basic take on empathy was taken up and modified by Schutz. I will conclude by briefly considering an objection that might be raised against the phenomenological proposal.

### 1. Lipps' „Das Wissen von fremden Ichen.“

Lipps' theory of *Einfühlung* or empathy underwent several changes in the course of his writings. In the following I will only discuss the brief and concise account we find in his 1907 article “Das Wissen von fremden Ichen.”<sup>2</sup> In this article, Lipps argues that our knowledge of others is a modality of knowledge *sui generis*, something as irreducible and original as our perceptual experience of objects or our memory of our past experiences. It is a novum that in no way can be explained by or reduced to some kind of analogical inference (Lipps 1907, 697-698, 710). In fact, Lipps launches a comprehensive – and quite successful – attack against the argument from analogy. He emphasizes the role of expression and argues that gestures and expressions manifest our emotional states, and that the relation between the expression and what is expressed is special and unique, and quite different from, say, the way smoke represents fire (Lipps 1907, 704-5).

So far, much of what Lipps has had to say found approval among later phenomenologists – indeed many of his points against the argument from analogy reappear in various forms in Scheler's *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* –, but the phenomenologists would be quite suspicious of his own positive account. Lipps argues that when I see a foreign gesture or expression, I have a tendency to reproduce it, and that this tendency also evokes the feeling normally associated with the expression. It is this feeling which is then attributed to the other through projection. It is projected into or onto the other's perceived gesture, thereby allowing for a form of interpersonal understanding (Lipps 1907, 717-719). More precisely, Lipps also talks of this process as being instinctual in character. He calls it the *instinct of empathy*, and argues that it involves two components, a drive directed towards imitation and a drive directed towards expression (Lipps 1907,

713). Why is there projection involved? Because we on Lipps' account only know of anger, joy etc. from our own case. The only mental states we have experiential access to are our own.

Lipps' position is by no means of mere historical interest. It is for instance not difficult to spot the similarities between Lipps' proposal and Goldman's position. Goldman has recently argued that a necessary condition for mindreading "is that the state ascribed to the target is ascribed as a result of the attributor's instantiating, undergoing, or experiencing, that very state" (Goldman & Sripada 2005, 208). Indeed, on Goldman's account "an attributor arrives at a mental attribution by simulating, replicating or reproducing in his own mind the same state as the target's, or by attempting to do so" (Goldman & Sripada 2005, 194). Goldman occasionally suggests that the observation of another's emotional expression automatically triggers the experience of that emotion in myself, and that this first-personal experience then serves as the basis for my third-person ascription of the emotion to the other. As he writes – in the context of discussing disgust expressions – "the evidence points towards the use of one's disgust experience as the causal basis for third-person disgust attributions" (Goldman 2006, 137). It is consequently no coincidence that Goldman considers a more apt name for the whole process to be simulation-plus-projection (Goldman 2006, 40). Why is this circuit through self deemed necessary? I need to project what I know about my own mind into the mind of others, because the only mind I have any direct and non-inferential knowledge of is my own. I know my own mind, but your mind is not present or manifest or given to me in any straightforward sense.

One reason for looking closer at the phenomenological criticism of Lipps is, of course, that such a criticism might remain pertinent when it comes to contemporary positions in the theory of mind debate.

## 2. Scheler, Husserl and Stein on empathy

Before proceeding to the more systematic discussion of Husserl's, Scheler's and Stein's accounts of empathy, first a word about terminology, since not all three of them were equally happy about the term.

- According to Scheler, we enjoy a basic experiential access to others – I will say more about what this amounts to in a moment –, but unfortunately, Scheler doesn't stick to a single term when referring to it. Rather, he indistinctly uses terms such as *Nachfühlen* (reproduction of feeling), *Nachleben* (reproduction

of experience), *Nacherleben* (visualizing of experience), *Verstehen* (understanding), or *Fremdwahrnehmung* (perception of other minds) (Scheler 1954, 9, 238). In some of the cases, the standard English translation might be less than ideal, but Scheler himself must also be blamed for the inevitable confusion. How can *Nachfühlen* and *Fremdwahrnehmung* refer to one and the same phenomenon? As we will see in a moment, Scheler rejects the view that our understanding of the emotional experience of others is based on an imitation or reproduction of the emotion in question, but why does he then himself use a term like *Nachfühlen*? For want of a better term, I have decided to use “empathy” as the best way of capturing what Scheler was referring to when he spoke of a basic experience of others. Now, it so happens that Scheler himself only used the German equivalent *Einfühlung* rather sparingly and when he did frequently rather dismissively. However, Scheler’s reservation was mainly due to his dissatisfaction with Lipps’ projective theory of empathy, and it is telling that other contemporary phenomenologists, such as Stein and Husserl, referred to Scheler’s own theory as a theory of empathy (*Einfühlung*) ((Stein 1989, 27, Husserl 1950, 173)).

- As for Husserl, he did occasionally use the term *Einfühlung*, though his preferred term, especially in his later writings was simply *Fremderfahrung*. On some occasions, however, Husserl openly expresses reservations regarding the term *Einfühlung*. In a manuscript from 1914-1915 he calls it “ein falscher Ausdruck,” since it in his view remains unclear whether the term is meant to designate the projection of one’s own self into a foreign body, or rather the actual encounter with a foreign embodied self (Husserl 1973a, 335-339).<sup>3</sup>
- If we finally turn to Stein, she basically defines empathy as a form of intentionality directed at foreign experiences – and specifically asks us to disregard any other traditional connotation the term might have (Stein 1989, 6). For the same reason, Stein can write that Scheler’s polemic against empathy is not directed against what she calls empathy (Stein 1989, 27).

I will follow Stein’s recommendation, and when I in the following refer to Husserl’s, Scheler’s and Stein’s accounts of empathy, I will simply be referring to their respective views on how we at the most basic level come to understand concrete others.

Let us start by looking at the kind of criticism that the phenomenologists directed at Lipps’ positive account. Husserl labelled Lipps’ appeal to fundamental instincts a “refuge of phenomenological ignorance”

and considered it a poor substitute for a proper analysis of the phenomenon in question (Husserl 1973a, 24). In addition, he criticized Lipps' extensive reliance on expression for being too coarse grained. It failed to consider the difference between various forms of expression, say, the difference between the expression of fear, exhaustion, temperament and personality, for instance (Husserl 1973a, 76). The most pervasive criticism, however, is directed at Lipps' claim that imitation constitutes the basis of empathy. On Lipps' account, when I observe somebody who is in pain or happy, this somehow requires me to be in pain or happy. Indeed, if the imitation is to serve any explanatory purpose, my own felt pain or joy must precede rather than follow my conscious recognition of the pain or joy in the other. But as Scheler writes, we might understand from the wagging tail of a dog that he is happy to see us, but this doesn't require us to imitate the expression ourselves (Scheler 1954, 11). Indeed, we are precisely able to understand expressions that we are unable to imitate. Moreover, as Stein points out, there is a discrepancy between the phenomenon to be explained and the phenomenon actually explained (Stein 1989, 23). Lipps' theory might explain why a certain experience occurs in me, but it doesn't offer an explanation of how I come to understand the other. Rather than explaining empathy, that is, empathy understood as an experience of the minded life of others, Lipps' account is better geared to handle something like *emotional contagion*.<sup>4</sup>

Consider the following case. You might enter a bar and be swept over by the jolly atmosphere. A distinctive feature of what is known as emotional contagion is that you literally catch the emotion in question (Scheler 1954, 15). It is transferred to you. It becomes your own emotion. Indeed you can be infected by the jolly or angry mood of others without even being aware of them as distinct individuals. But this is precisely what makes emotional contagion different from empathy. In empathy, the experience you empathically understand remains that of the other. The focus is on the other, and not on yourself, not on how it would be like for you to be in the shoes of the other. That is, the distance between self and other is preserved and upheld. Another distinctive feature of emotional contagion is that it concerns the emotional quality rather than the object of the emotion. You can be infected by cheerfulness or hilarity, without knowing what it is about. This is what makes emotional contagion different from what Scheler calls *emotional sharing*. Think of the situation where a father and mother stand next to the corpse of a beloved child. For Scheler, this situation exemplifies the possibility of sharing both an emotion (sorrow or despair) and the object of the emotion. But emotional sharing must on its part still be distinguished from empathy. Consider the situation where a common friend approaches the despairing parents. He can empathize (or sympathize)<sup>5</sup> with their sorrow,



without experiencing the despair in question himself, which is why his state of mind differs qualitatively from either of theirs. Indeed their sorrow and his empathy are clearly two distinct states. Their sorrow is the intentional object of his empathy (Scheler 1954, 12-13).<sup>6</sup> Thus, for Scheler as well as for Stein and Husserl, empathy is a basic, irreducible, form of intentionality that is directed towards the experiences of others. It is a question of understanding other experiencing subjects. But this doesn't entail that the other's experience is literally transmitted to us. Rather, it amounts to experiencing, say, the other person's emotion without being in the corresponding emotional state yourself. We might of course encounter a furious neighbor and become furious ourselves, but our empathic understanding of our neighbor's emotion might also elicit a quite different response, namely the feeling of fear. In either case, however, our emotional reaction is exactly that – a reaction. It is a consequence of our understanding of the other's emotion, and not a precondition or prerequisite for this understanding. Indeed how plausible is it after all to claim that I need to become furious myself, if I am to recognize the fury in the face of my assailant (Husserl 1973a, 188). The phenomenologists would consequently reject the view that imitation, emotional contagion or mimicry should be the paradigm of empathy. If presented with Goldman's view that a necessary condition for mindreading "is that the state ascribed to the target is ascribed as a result of the attributor's instantiating, undergoing, or experiencing, that very state" (Goldman & Sripada 2005, 208), they would argue that such an account conflates empathy with other kinds of interpersonal understanding and fails to capture the fact that we can and do *experience* others.

Let us now examine Scheler's positive account of empathy in slightly more detail, since this will also expose what appears to be a crucial disagreement between Scheler on the one side and Husserl and Stein on the other.

On Scheler's view, empathy isn't simply a question of intellectually judging that somebody else is undergoing a certain experience. It is not the mere thought that this is the case; rather, Scheler defends the view that we are empathically able to *experience* other minds (Scheler 1954, 9). It is no coincidence that Scheler repeatedly speaks of the perception of others (*Fremdwahrnehmung*), and even entitles his own theory *a perceptual theory of other minds* (Scheler 1954, 220). Scheler consequently opposes the view according to which our encounter with others is first and foremost an encounter with bodily and behavioral exteriorities devoid of any psychological properties. In the face-to-face encounter we are neither confronted with a mere body, nor with a pure soul, but with the unity of an embodied mind. Scheler speaks of an

“expressive unity” (*Ausdruckseinheit*), and claims that the notion of behavior is a psychophysically undifferentiated concept. It is only subsequently, through a process of abstraction, that this unity is divided and our interest then proceeds “inwards” or “outwards” (Scheler 1954, 218, 261). It is no coincidence that we use psychological terms to describe behavior and that we would be hard pressed to describe the latter in terms of bare movements. In the majority of cases, it is quite hard (and artificial) to divide a phenomenon neatly into its psychological and behavioral aspect: think merely of a groan of pain, a handshake, or a kiss. In Scheler’s view, affective and emotional states are not simply qualities of subjective experience, rather they are given *in* expressive phenomena, i.e., they are expressed in bodily gestures and actions, and they thereby become visible to others.

Instead of attempting to secure an access to the minded life of others through technical detours, Scheler argues that we need a new understanding of the given. If the realm of expressive phenomena is accepted as the primary datum or primitive stratum of perception, the access to the mind of others will no longer present the same kind of problem. What we see is the body of the other as a field expressive of his or her experiences (Scheler 1954, 10). Indeed, on Scheler’s view, expressive phenomena – in particular facial expressions and gestures, but also verbal expressions – can present us with a direct and non-inferential access to the experiential life of others. As he writes in what must count as a *locus classicus*:

For we certainly believe ourselves to be directly acquainted with another person's joy in his laughter, with his sorrow and pain in his tears, with his shame in his blushing, with his entreaty in his outstretched hands, with his love in his look of affection, with his rage in the gnashing of his teeth, with his threats in the clenching of his fist, and with the tenor of his thoughts in the sound of his words. If anyone tells me that this is not 'perception', for it cannot be so, in view of the fact that a perception is simply a 'complex of physical sensations', and that there is certainly no sensation of another person's mind nor any stimulus from such a source, I would beg him to turn aside from such questionable theories and address himself to the phenomenological facts (Scheler 1954, 260).

This and other similar statements by Scheler have, however, been met with criticism by other phenomenologists. The main issue of controversy concerns the claim that we can in principle enjoy as direct

an access to the experiential life of others as we can to our own (cf. Scheler 1954, 256). To fully understand the point of controversy we have to look briefly at a central piece of Husserl's theory of intentionality.

According to Husserl, we have to distinguish between *signitive*, *pictorial*, and *perceptual* ways of intending an object: I can talk about a blossoming peach tree which I have never seen, but which I have heard is standing in the backyard, I can see a detailed drawing of the peach tree; or I can perceive the peach tree myself. Similarly, I can talk about how fantastic it must be to fly in helicopter, I can see a television program about it; or I can experience it myself. For Husserl these different ways of intending are not unrelated. On the contrary, there is a strict hierarchical relation between them, in the sense that the modes can be ranked according to their ability to give us the object as directly, originally and optimally as possible. The object can be experienced more or less directly, that is, it can be more or less *present*. The lowest and most empty way in which the object can be intended is in the signitive act. These (linguistic) acts certainly have a reference, but apart from that, the object is not given in any fleshed out manner. The pictorial acts have a certain intuitive content, but like the signitive acts, they intend the object *indirectly*. Whereas signitive acts intend the object via a contingent representation (a linguistic sign), pictorial acts intend the object via a representation (picture) which bears a certain resemblance to the object as seen from a certain perspective. It is only the actual perception, however, which gives us the object directly. This is the only type of intention which presents us with the object itself in its bodily presence (*leibhaftig*), or, as Husserl says, *in propria persona*.

The tricky question is where to place empathy within this classification. The answer provided by Stein and Husserl are quite similar. Already in *Logische Untersuchungen* Husserl wrote that common speech credits us with percepts of other people's inner experiences, we so to speak see their anger or pain. As he then went on to say, such talk is to some extent correct. When a hearer perceives a speaker give voice to certain inner experiences, he also perceives these experiences themselves, but as Husserl then adds, however, the hearer doesn't have an inner but only an outer perception of them (Husserl 1984, 40). So on the one hand, Husserl argues that my experience of others has a quasi-perceptual character in the sense that it grasp the other him- or herself (Husserl 1973a, 24). On the other hand, Husserl also says that although the body of the other is intuitively given to me *in propria persona*, this is not the case with the other's experiences. They can never be given to me in the same original fashion as my own experiences; they are not accessible to me through inner consciousness. Rather they are appresented through a special

form of apperception, or to use a different terminology, they are co-intended and characterized by a certain co-presence (Husserl 1973a, 27). As Husserl puts it in *Ideen II*:

...each has lived experiences which are exclusively his own. Only he experiences these in their very self-presence, utterly originally. In a certain way, I also experience (and there is a self-givenness here) the other's lived experiences; i.e., to the extent that the empathy (*comprehensio*) accomplished as one with the originary experience of the body is indeed a kind of presentation, one that serves to ground the character of bodily co-existence. To that extent, what we have here is thus experience, perception. But this co-existence [...] does not, in principle, allow itself to be transformed into immediate originary existence (primal presence) (Husserl 1952, 198).<sup>7</sup>

For Stein, empathy announces in the most direct manner possible the actual presence of the other's experience although it doesn't provide us with first-personal access to it. To exemplify, let us consider a situation where a friend tells me that he has lost his mother, and I become aware of his distress. What kind of awareness is this? I obviously don't see the distress the same way I see the colour of his shirt, rather I see the distress "in" his pained countenance (Stein 1989, 6). In this case, it makes sense to say that I experience (rather than imagine or infer) his distress, though I certainly do lack a first-person experience of the distress; it is not *my* distress. Like Scheler, Stein consequently stresses the importance of not conflating empathy with emotional sharing (*Mitfühlen*). In the latter case, I feel, say, joy or distress over the same event as my friend. In the former case, I am primarily directed at my friend's experience (rather than at the object of his experience). Thus, Stein takes empathy to be a unique kind of experience in that when I empathize with another, the empathized experience is located in the other and not in myself. In short, empathy entails by necessity a difference between the subject of empathic experience and the subject of the empathized experience. Stein then goes on to argue that empathy is a *sui generis* modality of experience, but she also says that its content (the empathized experience) is given non-primordially (Stein 1989, 10-11). In short, empathy is both like and unlike perception. It is like perception in being direct, unmediated, and non-inferential (Stein 1989, 24). It is unlike perception in not offering us the fullest presence of the empathized experience – that presence is only available to the subject of the experience.

Is the difference between Scheler's view and that of Husserl and Stein substantial? I think one can reconcile the different positions – at least to some degree – by way of a slight reformulation. When claiming that we are able to *experience* others, and as a consequence do not exclusively have to rely on and employ inferences, imitations or projections, this is not meant to entail that we can experience the other in precisely the same way as she herself does, nor that the other's consciousness is accessible to us in precisely the same way as our own is. Second- (and third-) person access to psychological states *do* differ from first-person access. But we shouldn't make the mistake of restricting and equating experiential access with first-person access. It is possible to experience minds in more than one way. When I experience the facial expressions or meaningful actions of another, I am *experiencing* foreign subjectivity, and not merely imagining it, simulating it or theorizing about it. The fact that I can be mistaken and deceived is no argument against the experiential character of the access. As Moran has pointed out, the second- (or third-) person access only "falls short" of the first-person access if it is assumed that the latter is privileged and that it is the internal aspiration of the former to approximate the latter as closely as possible (Moran 2001, 157). We should recognize that each type of access has its own strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, the fact that my experiential access to the minds of other differs from my experiential access to my own mind is not an imperfection or shortcoming. On the contrary, it is a difference that is constitutional. It is precisely because of this difference, precisely because of this asymmetry, that we can claim that the minds we experience are *other* minds. As Husserl points out, had I had the same access to the consciousness of the other as I have to my own, the other would cease being an other and would instead become a part of myself (Husserl 1950, 139, 1973b, 12, 1962, 416). Indeed, a more precise way of capturing what is at stake is by saying that we experience bodily and behavioral expressions as expressive of an experiential life that transcends the expression. There is so to speak more to the mind of the other than what we are grasping, but this doesn't make our understanding non-experiential.

Phenomenologists would typically not dispute that self-experience is a precondition for other-experience. But there is a decisive difference between arguing that the former is a necessary condition (and that there would be no other-experience in its absence) and claiming that self-experience somehow serves as a model for other-experience, as if interpersonal understanding is basically a question of projecting oneself into the other. Consider, by contrast, Goldman's simulation-plus-projection routine. Goldman explicitly talks of the routine as consisting in "the act of assigning a state of one's own to someone else"

(Goldman 2006, 40). But this seems de facto to imprison me within my own mind and to prevent me from ever experiencing *others*. It is not insignificant that Lipps after having argued very much like Goldman reaches the following conclusion: “Psychologically considered, other human beings are duplications of myself” (Lipps 1900, 418).

### 3. Schutz and the thou-orientation

The phenomenological analysis of intersubjectivity and sociality obviously didn’t come to an end with the contributions of Husserl and Stein. It would at this point lead too far if I were to discuss the rich analyses to be found in Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty or Levinas – nor is this the right place for a more in-depth coverage of Husserl’s far richer contribution to a phenomenology of intersubjectivity.<sup>8</sup> Rather, in the following, I will focus on a slightly lesser well known figure, whose contribution to an analysis of interpersonal understanding has been unjustly neglected in recent years, namely Schutz. What is particularly interesting about Schutz’ account is that he while recognizing the fundamental and irreducible character of the face-to-face encounter at the same time emphasizes the heterogeneity of interpersonal understanding. Interpersonal understanding comes in many shapes and forms and if we wish to do justice to this variety and complexity we have to go beyond what a narrow focus on empathy can deliver.

In his 1932 book *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt: Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* Schutz rejects what he considers to be the two extreme positions of Scheler and Carnap. Whereas the former, on Schutz’ reading, argues that I have as direct an access to the lived experiences of others as I have to my own, the later argues that we never have any experience of other minds at all, but only of physical objects (Schutz 1967, 20-21). By contrast, Schutz defends the view that we do have experiential access to others, while denying that the experiences of others are intuitively given to us in their full self-presence. In Schutz’s view, the body of the other is no mere physical object, but a field of expression that reveals the experiential life of the other (Schutz 1967, 22). As he then points out, however, to simply talk of the body as a field of expression remains too imprecise. It may refer to the fact that (1) the external behavior of the other person indicates his subjective experiences, but it may also refer to the fact (2) that the subject “is deliberately seeking to express something” by acting in a certain way. And as Schutz points out,

many things that are expressions in the first sense – reddening with anger, for instance – are hardly expressions in the second. Thus, it would according to Schutz be incorrect to say that, say, a woodman by the act of chopping is deliberately expressing his desire to cut down trees, since one can only speak of an expression in this second sense if that which is expressed is intended as a message to a recipient (Schutz 1967, 22-23). On the basis of his distinction between these two types of expression (which Schutz adopts from Husserl's 1. *Logical Investigation*), Schutz further insists that we have to distinguish what he calls *expressive movements* (that lacks any communicative intent) from what he calls *expressive acts* (which includes it) (Schutz 1967, 116), and he faults Scheler for having exclusively focussed on expressive movements when providing examples of our supposedly direct access to the experiences of others. If we again take the woodcutter at work as our example, Schutz concedes that we to a certain extent might be said to perceive the woodcutter's experience of effort as he wields his axe, but ridicules the suggestion that we should also be able to perceive *why* he is acting the way he does (Schutz 1967, 24). Similar, although it on Schutz' view is permissible to say that certain aspects of the other's consciousness, such as his joy, sorrow, pain, shame, pleading, love, rage and threats, are given to us directly and non-inferentially, he denies that it should follow from the fact that we can intuit these surface attitudes that we also have a direct access to the *why* of such feelings. But when we speak of understanding (the psychological life of) others, what we mean is precisely that we understand what others are up to, why they are doing what they are doing, and what that means to them. To put it differently, interpersonal understanding crucially involves an understanding of the actions of others, of their whys, meanings and motives. And in order to uncover these aspects, it is not sufficient simply to observe expressive movements and actions, we also have to rely on interpretation, we also have to draw on a highly structured context of meaning (Schutz 1967, 23-24).

Schutz admits that we in some cases rely on imagination, memory or theoretical knowledge when attempting to understand others. We can for instance attempt to identify the goal of their actions and then imagine how we would seek to accomplish it and what experiences we would be living through. Or we might rely on memory and remember what we went through when we in the past sought to realize a similar goal (Schutz 1967, 114). Finally, we can also make use of our general knowledge regarding the kind of action in question and then seek to infer its causes and motives (Schutz 1967, 175). But if these means constitute our primary way of understanding others, are we then not, as Schutz asks, right back in some version of the *projective theory of empathy*, i.e., a theory that ultimately denies that we can experience

others? As Schutz emphasizes, however, the strategies just outlined are ones we primarily employ *after* the fact, i.e., in situations where the person we seek to understand isn't one that we are directly perceiving and interacting with. In the latter case, that is, in the face-to-face encounter, there is according to Schutz a concrete *we-relationship*, a shared motivational context where our respective streams of consciousness are interlocked, immediately affecting each other, and in such situations, there is a form of interpersonal understanding that isn't based on theory, imagination or past experiences (Schutz 1967, 115, 157, 172-175).

To fully understand Schutz' line of reasoning, which accentuates the extent to which concrete interpersonal understanding relies on practical engagement and involvement, we need to take a closer look at some of his technical terms and distinctions. Adopting and modifying a central Husserlian idea, Schutz speaks of a *general thesis of other self*, thereby denoting our fundamental conviction that the other exists, endures and consciously undergoes subjective experiences (Schutz 1967, 145). He also speaks of this attitude in terms of an *other-orientation* (*Fremdeinstellung*). An especially significant case of other-orientation is what Schutz labels *thou-orientation* (*Dueinstellung*) (Schutz 1967, 146, 163). This is a form of intentionality where the other is bodily co-present and immediately given as a psychophysical unity. As Schutz makes clear, this intentionality doesn't have the form of a conscious judgement or inference, rather, we are dealing with a pre-predicative experience (Schutz 1967, 164). The thou-orientation is directed at the living reality of the other, it doesn't involve any awareness of the other's character traits, beliefs or occurrent experiences. Thus, in the pure thou-orientation I grasp the *dasein* rather than the *sosein* of the other. In short, the thou-orientation provides me with an awareness of the presence of the other, but not with any specific awareness of what is going on in the other's mind.<sup>9</sup> Schutz stresses that a pure thou-orientation is a limit concept. In real life, we always experience real people with their own personal characteristics and traits. The thou-orientation of our daily life is consequently not a pure thou-orientation but an actualized and determinate thou-orientation. It is always colored by knowledge regarding the other (Schutz 1967, 162-164).

The thou-orientation can be reciprocal or one-sided. It is one-sided if it exists without any reciprocation on the part of the other, say, if I am secretly observing somebody. However, when two people are reciprocally oriented towards each other, or to adopt the first-person perspective, when I ascertain that the other towards whom I am thou-oriented is also thou-oriented towards me, we get what Schutz calls a *we-relationship* or a *living social relationship* (Schutz 1967, 157). Again, in its purity the we-relationship is a formal limit concept. In daily life, the we-relationship is always concretized and contextualized (Schutz 1967,



164), and can take many different forms. The partner can for instance be experienced with different degrees of intimacy and intensity.

Schutz considers the we-relationship, i.e., the direct face-to-face encounter, as basic in the sense that all other forms of interpersonal understanding derive their validity from this kind of encounter (Schutz 1967, 162). Thus, Schutz would insist that the experience of the bodily presence of others is prior to and more fundamental than any understanding of others that draws on imaginative projection, memory or theoretical knowledge. We only start to employ the latter strategies, when we are already convinced that we are facing minded creatures, but are simply unsure about precisely how we are to interpret the expressive phenomena in question or to put it differently, we would not start to inquire into the meaning of another's actions, we would not attempt to predict or explain them, were we not already convinced that the other was a minded, experiencing subject. Furthermore, the we-relationship is also basic in the sense that we find ourselves in a reciprocal thou-orientation (a we-relationship) before we come across a one-sided thou-orientation; an observation that makes good sense ontogenetically (Schutz 1967, 165-166).

For Schutz the face-to-face encounter is fundamental. But as he keeps emphasizing, it also has its clear limits. If we wish to develop a proper social relationship, if we wish to reach a deeper level of interpersonal understanding, we have to go beyond what is directly available (Schutz 1967, 168). Ordinarily, we always bring a whole stock of knowledge to the encounter with the other, both knowledge of a more general sort, but frequently also knowledge regarding the particular person in question, knowledge of his habits, interests etc. (Schutz 1967, 169). Indeed, it is crucial to realize that our understanding of others never takes place in a vacuum; it doesn't have the format of a snapshot.

But even if we must consider the social, cultural, and historical context if we wish to understand *why* somebody is feeling the way he does or *why* he is acting the way he does, even if there is much about the other that isn't readily accessible, there is a decisive difference between our everyday uncertainty about what precisely others might be thinking about, and the nightmare vision of the solipsist. Although we might be uncertain about the specific beliefs and intentions of others, this uncertainty does *not* make us question their very mindedness. In fact, as Merleau-Ponty would later point out, our relation to others is deeper than any specific uncertainty we might have regarding them (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 415). To put it differently, our recognition of others as minded creatures is not only more fundamental and certain than

our ascription of specific beliefs and emotions to others; but the latter practice is firmly rooted in the former conviction.

Although it is quite true that theoretical knowledge or past experience might facilitate our understanding of what somebody is up to and what he or she is thinking or feeling (which is why an obstetrician or mother might be better able to understand what a woman giving birth is going through than a teenager), this valid (if somewhat trivial) point regarding concrete facets of interpersonal understanding must be distinguished from the erroneous view that our very conviction that we are faced with a minded creature is to the same extent a result of theorizing or simulation.

#### *4. Schutz and the they-orientation*

One very important aspect of Schutz' theory that I haven't touched upon so far concerns his claim regarding the heterogeneity of the social world; it is structured in multiple ways. Correlatively speaking, interpersonal understanding is not a unitary phenomenon. It differs in character depending on whether the other in question is bodily present, or rather removed from us in space or time. It depends in short on whether the other belongs to the world of our associates, contemporaries, predecessors or successors, or to use Schutz' original terms, whether the other belongs to our *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt*, *Vorwelt* or *Folgewelt* (Schutz 1967, 14). So far the focus has exclusively been on social relationships that take place within our *Umwelt*, but this focus is too narrow and limited, it only covers a small, though admittedly central and fundamental, part of the social world. But we shouldn't forget that I am also able to understand and interact with those whom I have previously encountered face-to-face, but who now lives abroad, or those of whose existence I know, not as concrete individuals, but as points in social space defined by certain roles and functions, say, tax officials or train conductors, just as I can rely on and relate to those that have produced the artifacts I am currently using, or those that existed before I myself did, i.e., the members of the *Vorwelt*, who can continue to influence me, although I am in no position to influence them (Schutz 1967, 142-143). Thus, Schutz repeatedly stresses the multilayered character of the social world and argues that one of the important tasks of a phenomenological sociology is to conduct a careful analysis of these different strata.

Let us take a closer look at the way we engage with our contemporaries, i.e., those that I could experience directly, since we co-exist in time, but which I as a matter of fact do not, since they are not present in my immediate surroundings. Whereas the face-to-face relationship involves a direct experience of the other, even if it can be very casual, say, a chance meeting with a stranger on a train, my understanding of my contemporaries is by definition *indirect*, *inferential* and *impersonal*, though it can otherwise differ widely in character (Schutz 1967, 177, 181). Compare for instance my relation to and understanding of a close friend of mine, who has just moved outside the range of direct experience, with my relation to and understanding of the mailman or the anonymous producer of the pencil I am currently using. Although they all belong to my *Mitwelt*, my understanding of them obviously differs dramatically. Nevertheless, although I might have a very intimate knowledge regarding my friend, my understanding of him qua contemporary will still lack the directness and pre-predicative character of the face-to-face encounter (Schutz 1967, 178, 183), it will always be based on interpretive judgments that draw on my general knowledge of the social world.

To illustrate the shift of orientation in my attitude when I understand and interact with my contemporaries, Schutz introduces the term “they-orientation” (Schutz 1967, 183). In contrast to the thou-orientation where I am directly aware of the living presence of the other’s consciousness as it is manifested in expressive movements or expressive acts, my understanding of my contemporaries is always general in form, is always shaped and framed by structures of typicality (Schutz 1967, 181, 184). When I understand a contemporary, I don’t consider him as a unique person, rather I conceive of him as an instantiation of a type, and leave individual characteristics and changes out of account. This even holds true for close friends of mine, since my dealing with them is conducted under the assumption that they remain homogenous and stay the same (Schutz 1967, 182, 184). Schutz next distinguishes characterological ideal types from habitual ideal types. The former typify the other in terms of character and temperament – people like N behave in such and such a way when faced with such and such a situation – and are precisely ones that are prevalent in my dealing with contemporaries with whom I have had direct experience in the past. By contrast, habitual ideal types typify the other in terms of social functions and roles and are of a more anonymous kind (Schutz 1967, 196). Consider for instance the kind of social understanding that occurs when I mail a letter. When doing so, my action is guided by assumptions I make regarding some of my contemporaries, namely the mailmen. I assume that they will read the address and send the letter to its recipient. I don’t know them personally and I don’t think of them as particular individuals, but by behaving the way I do, I relate to them as

ideal types, as bearers of certain functions. As Schutz puts it, when I am they-oriented I have types for partners (Schutz 1967, 185). And of course, for this social process to work, the mailmen have to relate to me as well, not as a particular individual, but as a typical customer. Taking up a mutual they-orientation we think of each other as *one of them* (Schutz 1967, 202).

In ordinary life we move between *Umwelt* and *Mitwelt* constantly, and as Schutz points out the change from one to the other presents no problem. This is so because we always interpret our own behavior and that of the other within contexts of meaning that transcend the here and now. In that sense, a narrow concern with the question of whether our relationship is direct or indirect is somewhat academic (Schutz 1967, 178). This is even more so, given that the use of ideal types is not limited to the world of contemporaries (or the world of our predecessors or successors). The ideal types we acquire become part of our stock of knowledge, and start to influence our face-to-face interactions as well, that is, they come to serve as interpretive schemes even in the world of direct social experience (Schutz 1967, 185).

But doesn't this concession raise doubts about the extent to which our understanding of others is direct and theoretically unmediated? In fact, couldn't the marked emphasis on the importance of context that we find in Schutz count as an argument in favor of classifying his account as a version of the theory-theory of mind?

It obviously depends on how one understands the notions of direct and theoretical. For comparison consider the case of vision. Vision usually counts as the paradigm of direct experience. I can theorize about a volcanic eruption, I can imagine what it must be like to see it, and I can see and experience it in all its splendor, but – and this is an old insight – when we perceive an object, we perceive it in a perceptual field. We are conscious of it in a particular setting, and the way it is given to us is influenced by what is co-given with it. I see no conflict between this insight and the claim that the perceptual object is directly given. Similarly, consider the case of utensils, say, a stethoscope. For something to be intended as a stethoscope, for something to appear as a stethoscope, a whole network of equipmental contexture, to use a Heideggerian phrasing, must be in place. But again, this fact doesn't make the perception of a stethoscope indirect and theory-laden in the same way as our positing of black holes or sub-atomic particles. It doesn't make our access to the stethoscope non-experiential; it doesn't turn the stethoscope into an unobservable and theoretically postulated entity.

To put it differently, there is no contradiction in defending the direct and contextual character of perception at the same time. The same holds true when it comes to interpersonal understanding. There are ways of understanding others that are as direct as our perception of medium sized objects – which is not to deny that there are also important differences between our perception of objects and our understanding of other subjects. One can consequently concede that our typical understanding of others is contextual without endorsing the view that our engagement with others as minded creatures is primarily a question of attributing hidden mental states to them. Schutz' description of the *thou*-attitude supports this conclusion and makes it clear why his account cannot be assimilated into the framework of the theory-theory.

It should be obvious, I think, how Schutz' discussion can complement the accounts of empathy found in Scheler, Stein and Husserl.<sup>10</sup> Three main points can be garnered from Schutz' elaborate analysis; three points that remain relevant for contemporary discussions of social cognition. First of all, Schutz makes it abundantly clear that interpersonal understanding comes in many shapes and forms and that a single model cannot do justice to the whole variety. We should consequently be wary of any theory that claimed that our understanding of others is solely a question of, say, imaginative projection, analogical reasoning, or inference to best explanation. Secondly, Schutz argues that the most basic form of interpersonal understanding, the one we find in the reciprocal *thou*-orientation, i.e., in the face-to-face encounter, is a theoretically unmediated quasi-perceptual ability to recognize other creatures directly as minded creatures and that this amounts to an irreducible *sui generis* form of intentionality. Finally, when it comes to understanding the *why* of the other's actions, Schutz argues that we in those cases where the other in question is one that is bodily co-present do not have to rely exclusively on imagination, memory or theory (though all three might occasionally be used), but that a more productive focus is on the shared motivational context and situation, on the fact that we encounter each other in a shared world (Schutz 1967, 170). To put it differently, when seeking to understand the reasons and motives of another, we shouldn't overlook that our perception of the other person, as another agent, is never of an entity existing outside of a situation, but of an agent in the middle of a pragmatic context that throws light on the intentions of that agent. If, in the vicinity of a stereo set, I see you reach for a CD, my understanding of your intentions is obviously facilitated by the fact that I can also see the CD and the stereo set, see the actions that they afford. Moreover, there is always a temporal dimension to the face-to-face encounter, we grow old together, as Schutz puts it (Schutz 1967, 163, 172), and the fact that we experience what comes before and after a certain expressive movement or

act, obviously also facilitates and aids our understanding of the expression in question. Moreover, as Schutz points out, when interacting directly with somebody, I have the unique possibility of having my assumptions about his experiences confirmed or disconfirmed by direct questions (Schutz 1967, 140, 174). To put it differently, if somebody is acting in a puzzling way, the easiest way to gain further information is not by engaging in detached theorizing or internal simulation, it is to employ one's conversational skills and ask the person for an explanation.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the previous sections, I have presented various facets of a phenomenological account of social cognition and argued that it constitutes an alternative to both the simulation theory and theory-theory. Let me conclude by considering an obvious objection.

It could be argued that there is something quite misleading about depicting the phenomenological proposal as such an alternative, and that the very suggestion reveals a fundamental confusion. After all, couldn't simulationists and theory-theorists simply accept the phenomenological description *tout court*, but just insist that this description remains a personal-level description, one that doesn't consider the underlying sub-personal mechanisms, which are the ones that simulationists and theory-theorists are interested in.<sup>11</sup> To be more specific, couldn't simulationists and theory-theorists concede that the phenomenological account offers a good description of the explanandum, but then insist that they themselves are in the business of discovering and detailing the explanatory mechanisms, and that this is a quite different (and far more ambitious) enterprise than the phenomenological one.

In reply, let me make it clear that I am obviously not denying that my understanding of others is subserved by various sub-personal mechanisms, and I don't think phenomenology by itself can unearth those mechanisms. But there are two issues we shouldn't forget. The first issue concerns to what extent sub-personal mechanisms involve routines that merit the name of simulation and theorizing. Whereas it is relatively easy to understand what is meant by simulation and theorizing as long as the terms denote personal-level processes, the use of the terms to denote sub-personal processes might increase the

plausibility of the claim that they are ubiquitous but at the cost of making the meaning of the terms quite unclear.<sup>12</sup> The second issue concerns the relation between explanandum and explanans. If we take the theory-theory account as example, it was supposedly developed in order to explain a certain cognitive achievement, namely the move from the perception of observable behavior to the attribution of unobservable mental states. Depending on whether one opts for a personal level or a subpersonal level version of the theory-theory, opinions differ regarding the status of the cognitive step. On one reading, we are dealing with a conscious inference, on a different reading we are dealing with unconscious inferential processes. On both accounts however we are dealing with a kind of inference to best explanation. Both accounts agree on the explanandum. If by contrast, we concede that there is no move from the perception of behavior to the attribution of hidden mental states, but that we rather experience the minds of others directly – which is what the phenomenological account would claim – we have not only departed from what one might consider a defining feature of the theory-theory, we have also changed the explanandum radically. To suggest that the explanatory power of the subpersonal level version of the theory-theory can remain unaffected by this change is to endorse a highly unusual view of the relation between explanandum and explanans. The same argument obviously applies to the simulation theory.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The dissertation was published in 1921. The footnote was added in 1961.

<sup>2</sup> For a very detailed discussion of how the concept of empathy was employed by Lipps and contemporary psychologists and philosophers like Siebeck, Volkelt, Witasek and Groos, see Geiger 1911.

<sup>3</sup> As Husserl writes at one point, “Actually, no empathy occurs [...]. Nor does any kind of analogizing occur, no analogical inference, no transferral through analogy [...]. Rather, the ‘apperception’ of the foreign psychic life takes place without further ado” (Husserl 1973a, 338-339).

<sup>4</sup> Stein is also known for criticizing Lipps for conflating empathy (*Einfühlung*) with a feeling of oneness (*Einsfühlung*), i.e., of taking empathy to involve a complete identification of observer and observed. (In Scheler’s *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, one finds a related rejection of a claim, proposed by Schopenhauer and Hartmann, that empathy testifies to the metaphysical unity of all individuals (Scheler

1954, 65)). More recently, however, Stueber has argued that this specific criticism of Stein is based on a too uncharitable interpretation of Lipps' statements (Stueber 2006, 8).

<sup>5</sup> Scheler distinguishes empathy from sympathy. Contrast the situation where you see the face of a crying child as emotionally expressive, but without feeling any compassion, i.e., while remaining indifferent, with the situation where you also feel compassion or concern for the child. Whereas Scheler considers the former a case of empathy, he takes the latter to be a case of sympathy. In short, whereas empathy has to do with a basic understanding of expressive others, sympathy adds care or concern for the other.

<sup>6</sup> One finds a related distinction in Husserl, although with a terminological twist. As he points out, feeling compassion with someone who has, say, lost his father, involves feeling sorrow about the fact that the other person laments the loss of his father, rather than simply feeling sorrow about the death of the father (Husserl 2004, 194).

<sup>7</sup> Although this quote captures a central tenet of Husserl's account, it certainly doesn't do full justice to his detailed account of the intentionality of *Fremderfahrung*, which includes meticulous analyses of such notions as appresentation (*Appräsentation*) and pairing (*Parrung*). But a more thorough treatment would exceed the scope of this article. More extensive discussions can, however, for instance be found in Yamaguchi 1982 and Depraz 1995. See also Taguchi 2006 for a recent account of Husserl's understanding of the relation between self and other.

<sup>8</sup> For further discussions of phenomenological theories of intersubjectivity, see Zahavi 1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2002, 2007, 2008.

<sup>9</sup> For an interesting convergence, consider Honneth who in a recent book writes that the foundation of intersubjectivity is a form of existential recognition that lies below the threshold of and provides the foundation for all those more substantial forms of recognition where the other person's specific characteristics are affirmed (Honneth 2008, 51, 90).

<sup>10</sup> For more on Schutz appraisal of Scheler's theory of intersubjectivity, see Schutz 1962, 150-179. When it comes to Schutz' appraisal of Husserl there is one aspect that I have chosen to ignore in this paper. It concerns the question as to whether the problem of intersubjectivity calls for a transcendental analysis or whether it should rather be addressed on the basis of an ontology of the lifeworld. Husserl famously took the former to be the case. Initially, Schutz followed him in this, but he subsequently changed his mind. For a



vivid illustration of this shift, consider the following two statements. In a letter to Husserl dated April 26, 1932 Schutz writes, “Thus I found in your development of the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity the key to almost all sociological problems that have beset me for so many years” (Husserl 1994, 482). In a later, and much discussed, article from 1957, however, Schutz writes as follows: “It can, however, be said with certainty that only such an ontology of the life-world, not a transcendental constitutional analysis, can clarify that essential relationship of intersubjectivity which is the basis of all social science” (Schutz 1975, 82). For further discussions of this issue, see Zahavi 1996a and 1996b.

<sup>11</sup> Not everybody would agree with this, obviously. After all, some simulationists and theory-theorists do maintain that their accounts capture personal-level processes.

<sup>12</sup> For a more extensive criticism, see Zahavi 2005, Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, chap. 9.

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